

# YOLO COUNTY

## DRAFT HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN

*A Plan to Mitigate Biological Impacts  
from Urban Development in Yolo County*

Prepared For

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
California Department of Fish and Game  
The County of Yolo  
The Cities of:  
Davis  
West Sacramento  
Winters  
Woodland

Prepared By

EIP Associates

In Association With:  
Economic & Planning Systems  
American Farmland Trust

December 1995

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

## 1. OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

The Yolo County Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP or Plan) is a voluntary plan that mitigates the loss of biological resources (29 species and their habitats) from future urban development. The Plan also provides a framework within which countywide habitat conservation can occur in the long term. As importantly, the HCP maintains existing agricultural values in those areas of the County where HCP mitigation will occur.

Growth allowable under the general plans of the cities of Woodland, Winters, West Sacramento and Davis, and four smaller community plans in Knights Landing, Esparto, Dunnigan, and Clarksburg is used to predict future urban development to be mitigated by the HCP. Assuming "buildout" of the general and community plans, urban development would result in the loss of 12,299 acres of habitat to be mitigated by the HCP. Additionally, up to 2,000 acres of development associated with agricultural processing facilities in unknown locations throughout unincorporated areas of the County will also be mitigated by the HCP.

The HCP will be the basis for an *incidental take* permit to be issued by the Federal government under Section 10(a)(1)(B) of the Endangered Species Act, which is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). It will also be the basis for a *managed take* permit under Section 2081 of the California Fish and Game Code, which is administered by the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG). These permits will cover the loss of habitat from urban development and agricultural facilities described above. With the exception of the agricultural processing facilities, all permitted development will occur within the urban expansion areas of four cities and four unincorporated communities.

The proposed term of the permit is 20 years. Using past development trends, impacts are predicted to occur at an average rate of 225-to-250 acres per year. At this average growth rate, approximately 4,500 to 5,000 total acres of development would occur and be mitigated by the HCP during the proposed life of the permit.

## 2. STUDY AREA BOUNDARY

The HCP study area includes that portion of Yolo County occupying the Sacramento Valley, including the Delta. The western boundary of the Sacramento Valley is approximated by the 100-meter elevation (i.e. approximately the 300-foot elevation contour). This area includes the Dunnigan Hills, but excludes the foothills and mountains of the western portion of the County. The area borders Colusa County on the north, Solano County on the south, and the Sacramento River on the east. The total study area encompasses 465,908 acres (see Figure 1-3 in Chapter 1).

throughout the unincorporated County. The location where "take" from urban development will occur is shown in Figure 1-3 in Chapter 1. The majority of this loss will occur on agricultural lands (88 percent) with the remainder occurring on grasslands, riparian, wetlands, and woodland habitats (see Table ES-1).

TABLE ES-1 HABITAT LOSS FROM URBAN DEVELOPMENT MITIGATED BY THE HCP		
Habitat Type	Acreage	Percent of Total
Riparian	89	1 %
Wetland	743	6 %
Woodland	63	.5 %
Grassland	549	4.5 %
Agriculture	10,855	88 %
TOTAL:	12,299	100 %

Table ES-2 presents the habitat loss from urban development as a percentage of total habitat within the HCP study area. As can be seen, the total urban development impact represents a very small fraction of total habitat lands within the HCP study area. Total impacts to these habitat types would be less over the course of the proposed 20-year permit period.

### Agriculture

Agriculture is a vitally important part of the Yolo County economy. On a statewide level, Yolo County is one of the major producers of processing tomatoes, and possesses some of the richest soils of any county in the state. Agricultural land also provides valuable habitat for the multiple species under consideration in the HCP. Accordingly, achieving compatibility between agricultural activities and habitat preservation is important to the success of the HCP. A key goal of the Plan is to maintain agricultural production values on mitigation sites, but not to mitigate for the loss of agricultural land from urban development, which is addressed through a separate environmental review process subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

TABLE ES-2  
HABITAT LOSS AS  
PERCENTAGE OF STUDY AREA LANDS

- ▶ Loss of agricultural lands from urban development represents 3% of total study area agricultural lands.
- ▶ Loss of grasslands from urban development represents 1% of total study area grasslands.
- ▶ Loss of riparian habitat from urban development represents 0.7% of total study area riparian habitat.
- ▶ Loss of woodlands from urban development represents 2% of study area woodlands.
- ▶ Loss of wetlands from urban development represents 3% of study area wetlands.

The HCP requires that, on average, one acre of mitigation area will be provided for each acre of impact (1-to-1 ratio). The predominant form of mitigation will be agricultural conservation easements that maintain existing agricultural and biological values for the target species. Enhancements to property will also be encouraged where willing sellers are interested in adding greater biological value to a mitigation site.

Mitigation fees will be the primary source of financing for the HCP. A mitigation fee of \$2,630 per acre will be paid, or land offered in-lieu of the fee at a 1-to-1 mitigation ratio, by developers participating in the HCP (See Section 6, Implementation and Financing).

### Mitigation Site Selection

All mitigation will occur on lands within the 465,000 acre HCP study area. The goal will be to select mitigation sites that have the highest existing or potential habitat values, the least effect on agricultural productivity, the greatest collateral value, and represent the most cost effective use of HCP funds. Mitigation sites offered by willing sellers must meet certain minimum criteria.

- ▶ **Biological Value** - mitigation areas must fit within one of the primary habitat types and be biologically related to the habitat lost to development on an average annual basis (see HCP Habitat Composite Map, Figure 2-4). Connectivity and clustering of mitigation parcels is emphasized, consistent with a conservation strategy that encourages preservation of high value sites and restoration of areas with potential to improve countywide ecological values (see Figure 6-6).
- ▶ **Agricultural Value** - must maintain existing production values to meet minimum criteria in this category, as measured by dollar volume per acre.
- ▶ **Collateral Value** - locating parcels adjacent to, or (in selected cases) on public land that has habitat enhancement potential, is encouraged to reduce conflicts with agricultural activities and provide greater potential for connecting protected areas.
- ▶ **Willing Seller** - a willing seller must be identified as a minimum criterion for a site to be considered.

**TABLE ES-4  
HCP MITIGATION GUIDELINES  
AND PROCEDURES**

Mitigation Site Selection

- ▶ Willing Sellers
- ▶ Site Suitability Guidelines

Preservation and Enhancement Measures

- ▶ Fixed Location and Limited Range Species Strategies
- ▶ Birds - Strategies

Landowner/Farmer Protections

Monitoring/Reporting

### Target Bird Species

The primary target species of concern is the Swainson's hawk, which is distributed along the major riparian areas in the County, including the Sacramento River, Cache Creek, Willow Slough, Putah Creek and Dry Slough during the nesting season. The hawk forages throughout most of the County on large, open agricultural fields, grasslands and pastures which have an abundant prey base.

Mitigation strategies are to preserve existing habitat, preserve known nesting sites and corridors, enhance areas bordering the sites and corridors, establish new prey species habitat and to plant trees. The most common mitigation method will assure the continuation of ongoing rotation of crops on agricultural lands that serve as forage. Mitigation sites can also be enhanced through planting trees, shrubs, hedgerows or native grasses along the edges of property, or by creating or expanding riparian areas in a manner that does not disrupt agricultural practices. Habitat corridors can be created adjacent to riparian areas in a manner that is also sensitive to maintaining agricultural practices. Mitigation procedures and enhancements are illustrated in Figures 6-7 through 6-11 and listed in Tables 6-3 and 6-4 of Chapter 6.

### Other Target Species

Several target species will benefit from the mitigation strategies described above. These species are the California tiger salamander, Western spadefoot toad, Western pond turtle, whitefaced ibis, doublecrested cormorant, Cooper's hawk, Northern harrier, the greater sandhill crane, yellowbilled cuckoo, short-eared owl, bank swallow, loggerhead shrike, tri-colored blackbird and California yellow warbler. For these species, known nest sites or occurrences will not be directly impacted by urban development. Mitigation measures described above and in Table 6-4 of Chapter 6 will mitigate potential impacts to unknown occurrences of these species.

### **Landowner/Farmer Protections**

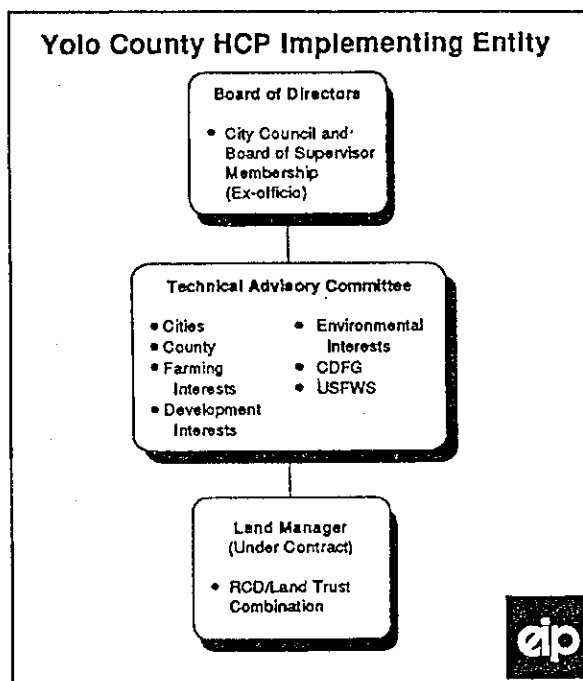
The HCP provides indemnification protection to all properties within a 500 foot radius of mitigation sites for those owners not wishing to participate in the Plan. Such protection ensures that future liability for these properties under the incidental take provisions of the ESA and the CESA can be avoided. Neighboring lands that are either cultivated or fallow at the time HCP easements or other agreements are signed, and that subsequently become inhabited by listed species due to the direct habitat enhancement of the participating property, will be covered for incidental take. Incidental take coverage will not be extended to natural habitat areas on neighboring land because of the likelihood that those areas may already be inhabited by listed species. "Hold harmless" protection does not relieve the participating landowner of responsibility for compliance with other federal, state or local laws, but provides protection to ensure that ordinary farming practices can continue, even if such activity results in an incidental take.

## Implementing Entity

The Implementing Entity will be formed by a joint powers agreement (JPA) and will include a Board of Directors, a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and a Land Manager, as described below.

**Board of Directors** - To provide the necessary statutory authority and permanence, and political accountability, the Board of Directors will be composed of elected representatives from each of the four city councils and the Board of Supervisors. The board will meet periodically to review mitigation site recommendations and authorize the expenditure of funds to implement site acquisitions and habitat enhancement.

**Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)** - A TAC will be composed of representatives of the USFWS, CDFG, the four cities, Yolo County, and key interest group representatives from the agricultural, environmental, and development/business communities. Additionally, U.C. Davis and the Yolo County Resource Conservation District (depending upon its potential role in the HCP land management process), may also serve on the TAC. The TAC will review potential mitigation sites recommended by the Land Manager for compliance with HCP goals and policies and make recommendations to the Implementing Entity Board of Directors regarding which mitigation sites are most suitable.



**Land Manager** - The Land Manager will conduct most of the technical HCP implementation work, including evaluating potential mitigation sites, overseeing habitat enhancements, preparing monitoring reports, holding title to land and easements, and working closely with the TAC and willing sellers. The Land Manager will serve under contract to the Implementing Entity. The Land Manager will possess a range of technical and management skills and experience in the areas of habitat enhancement with training in biological or ecological science, land use, real estate economics and agricultural practices. The Land Manager will also have strong communication and interpersonal skills with demonstrated success in similar positions.

Some combination of the Resource Conservation District (RCD) and the Yolo Land Conservation Trust is proposed to perform the land management function. Other options for the Implementing Entity, which could also perform the land management function, are described in Chapter 7. These options include modification or expansion of the RCD, creation of a new special district, and expansion or creation of a new non-profit organization.

## 8. UNFORESEEN CIRCUMSTANCES

Through an extensive public involvement process, this HCP has comprehensively evaluated and anticipated many future circumstances. However, should unforeseen circumstances arise, these would be addressed by the TAC and, if necessary, referred to the Board of Directors for policy action. Activities that require amendments to the Plan will require approval of the Implementing Entity Board of Directors and the Resource Agencies.

94001  
Streams